DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 069 234 HE 003 560

AUTHOR	Furniss, W. Todd
TITLE	External Degrees: An Initial Report.
INSTITUTION	American Council on Education, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	26 Feb 71
NOTE	4p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Standards; Accreditation (Institutions); *Degree Requirements; Degrees (Titles); *External Degree Programs; *Higher Education; *Open Education; Residence Requirements; *Special Degree Programs

ABSTRACT

Over the past several years studies have indicated that traditional certification models are not working as well as they once did, particularly in relation to a larger and larger number of unconventional students to be served, and if possible, certified. Two major problems stand in the way of creating educational opportunities that would afford these unconventional students the opportunity of obtaining credentials via external degrees: college and university residence requirements and accreditation requirements. This document presents arguments as they are stated by educational institutions against external degree programs and lists some issues that must be taken into account before such programs are created. (HS)

ED 069234

ACE Special Report

American Council on Education • One Dupont Circle, Washington, D.C. 20036

February 26, 1971

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

External Degrees: An Initial Report

In the Winter 1970–71 issue of the *College Board Review* (pp. 5–10), Alan Pifer titled an article, "Is it time for an external degree?" which was widely reported in the press. On February 16, he answered his own question by announcing Carnegie Corporation grants (matched by Ford) to the State University of New York and the New York Education Department to help in initiating two varieties of "external degree." At the same time Ford gave additional grants to the Union for Experimenting Colleges and Universities to help plan and develop its "University Without Walls," and to Syracuse University to establish an external baccalaureate program in five local counties.

Details of the Carnegie- and Ford-funded programs may be found in *Higher Education and National Affairs* (Washington: American Council on Education), Feb. 19, 1971, pp. 1–3. Alan Pifer's article reviews the two principal English models for "external degrees," that offered for many years by the University of London, and the newest model, the "Open University," which got under way in January 1971. Another variant is to be found in a proposal for a National University by Jack N. Arbolino and John R. Valley ("Education: The Institution or the Individual?" *Continuing Education*, October 1970, p. 6). Information about yet another variant, the HUD "University Without Walls," may be obtained from the Community Development Training Program of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Washington, D.C. 20410.

When the American Council on Education decided to devote its 1970 and 1971 annual meetings to the theme "Higher Education for Everybody?" it anticipated the social pressures that have led so quickly to these and other unconventional programs designed for "untraditional" students: adults seeking reentry to education after a period away, the poor of all ages who could not pay for college, the educationally disadvantaged who could not qualify, the workers who could not afford the time for a standard program, those whose experience was the equivalent of portions of a college education, and so forth.

In November 1970, the Council's Commission on Academic Affairs, in conjunction with its Committee on Higher Adult Education, planned to embark on an active program centered on the concept of the untraditional student. As part of this undertaking, the Council, in cooperation with the Association of American Colleges and the National Commission on Accrediting, began planning first for a program designed to inform the higher education community of what issues it could expect to face as the movement for external degrees developed. Almost at the same time, the College Entrance Examination Board and the Educational Testing Service, with support from the Carnegie Corporation, established a Commission on Non-Traditional Study, with Dr. Samuel B. Gould as director, to make a study of the issues and prepare recommendations. Cooperation between CEEB–ETS and ACE has included the appointment of Joseph P. Cosand, chairman of the Council, Frank G. Dickey, executive director of NCA, and W. Todd Furniss, director of the Council's Commission on Academic Affairs, to the Gould Commission. ACE action will be planned to dovetail with the work of the Gould Commission, which will hold its first meeting on March 8 and 9, 1971.

As proposals for external degrees and similar programs have

HE003560

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

multiplied, so have comments like, "You might as well give everyone his degree at birth," and "The college that does not move now toward offering degrees for untraditional study is headed the way of the mammoth." The comments share at least the point that no collegiate institution can ignore the movement. In the expectation that Council members will become involved in study and experimentation before the Gould Commission and other study groups make their recommendations, this *ACE Special Report* presents a brief analysis (originally prepared as a staff report) which may help members sort out some of the important issues.

New Certification Models?

W. TODD FURNISS
Director, Commission on Academic Affairs

New York Education Commissioner Ewald Nyquist's suggestion, in September 1970, that the New York Board of Regents consider awarding an "external degree" for undergraduate study was only one of a number of programs for modifying conventional American degree-granting methods recently proposed or adopted. Others include two different programs called "University Without Walls" (one funded by the U.S. Office of Education and Ford; the other, by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development), a proposal by Alan Pifer for an "Open University" (presumably similar to the one just starting in England), and Arbolino and Valley's proposal for a "National University." What is the stimulus for these programs? How do they differ from conventional degree programs? Do they raise issues new to American higher education? If so, what should be the response?

Despite the readiness with which the term "external" is applied in the new proposals, in each case a close examination reveals that its meaning is highly ambiguous and might profitably be abandoned in favor of precise statements of the relationships among students, instructional programs, examinations and examiners, and certifying agencies. In fact, the new programs conform reasonably closely to one or more of the three common American certification models and can be discussed as variants of them.

The basic American model is that of a single certifying institution that itself conducts the three functions of instruction, examination, and certification (award of the degree). The "transfer model" is an adaptation in which instruction and examination conducted in another institution are accepted for degree credit without reexamination by the certifying (degree-granting) institution. In the "credit-by-examination model," the certifying institution requires a validation (either by its own or another agency's examination) of the student's claim to have learned enough to receive credit.

All of these models have in common the principle that the certifying function lies with the faculty of an independent institution and that the guarantor of the institution's reliability is periodic review and accreditation by a voluntary association of professionals.

Shortcomings of the Common Models

Most of the alleged deficiencies of the conventional certification models arise out of their impact on the student, and particularly on the student whose circumstances are in any way unconventional.

Today, American social policy requires that those who have the capability for advancement be given the opportunity to advance. For many of these, this policy means that access to a college degree must not be foreclosed if there is any way to keep it open for them. Transfer credit and credit by examination have long served this function, although each independent certifying institution has applied restrictions on the full exercise of the possibilities inherent in the models. The newer certification proposals are little more than attempts to make the existing models work more liberally through one or more of the following means: taking instruction to the student where he is or must be because of his work or family commitments (e.g., HUD's University Without Walls; England's–and presumably Pifer's–Open University); arranging to give transfer credit for more kinds of work than in the past, chiefly by accrediting a wider range of unconventional programs (such as military instruction) or some kinds of work experience (such as the Peace Corps); and arranging to give credit by examination for learning acquired independently or in unconventional programs, the validation to be based on regional or national examinations (e.g., College-Level Examination Program) or by a certifying institution's own exams. (The University of London, a model of an extreme form, validates a full collegiate program in two 10-hour examinations.)

If these new programs are no more than extensions of models accepted for many years in American education, one might expect that there should be few problems in their adop-

tion. Nevertheless, there are at least two such problems, which might be tagged the Cosa Nostra Issue and the Caretaker's Daughter Issue, which stand in the way of the further liberalizing of our models.

Faculty Authority: Cosa Nostra

All our certification models call for a faculty to evaluate and approve all student performance. Transfer credit and credit by examination are not considered to be matters of student right or privilege but rather extensions of faculty rights and responsibilities. "The degree you seek is cosa nostra."

It is not at all surprising, therefore, that every conventional institution retains two restrictions in all its requirements for the degree: a maximum number of credit that may be transferred or earned by examination, the remainder to be taken "in residence" (that is, with our faculty even if not in our geographical location); and a refusal to grant *full* credit toward the local degree for work given full credit elsewhere (e.g., We won't accept D's for transfer).

Of course, to attribute these restrictions to defects in the faculty's thinking about credit will quickly bring such counterarguments as: "We need the residence requirement because our degree represents our judgment not only of the student's ability to regurgitate knowledge on exams but also of how he handles himself in face-to-face encounters with faculty and fellow students," or "We have to be chary of giving full credit because there is at least one other accredited institution with standards lower than ours," or even "We need the residence requirement to survive financially."

Whatever the validity of the counterarguments, it is clear that a number of the current proposals have been made so as to circumvent the presumed intransigence of faculties in independent institutions.

Accreditation: The Caretaker's Daughter

The three standard certification models assume a certifying institution that is a college or university with a faculty, a location, a library, some conventional instruction, and a curriculum, all of which can be subjected to periodic scrutiny by a regional accrediting association.

Most (not all) of the new proposals call for a certificate to be awarded by an institution that lacks one or more of the conventional attributes and therefore does not fall within the ordinary patterns for accreditation. What accrediting agency is now prepared to judge the reliability of Arbolino and Valley's National University, or Nyquist's New York Board of Regents, or Pifer's Open University? It may be instructive that the HEW-supported University Without Walls as originally proposed called for the chartering of a new consortium-like agency to award degrees to the university's students; as it now is to operate, the degrees will be awarded by the individual participating institutions, which are already accredited.

A subsidiary set of accreditation issues arises in establishing standards for accrediting learning acquired in unconventional ways: through independent reading, on the job, or by other noncollegiate means.

Modify the System or Replace It?

The new certification proposals, coupled with such recommendations as those embodied in the Carnegie Commission's report *Less Time, More Options* (McGraw-Hill, December 1970), indicate that traditional certification models are not working as well as they once did, particularly in relation to a larger and larger number of unconventional students to be served and, if possible, certified. A number of the proposals imply that, in some fashion, the local control of independent certifying institutions must be supplemented, if not replaced, by some national certifying agency. Without prejudging the need for a national agency for certification, it seems appropriate that ACE and other national organizations examine the issues and ultimately make recommendations to their members.

Many of the issues have recently been dealt with in whole or in part in the papers for ACE's 1970 Annual Meeting* and elsewhere; thus, tackling the questions below should not necessitate starting from scratch in every case. Nevertheless, each of them should be considered.

These are the principal questions:

1. What characteristics of students make conventional certification models as they now operate unsatisfactory? Can we describe students with these characteristics so as to formulate a realistic idea of the unmet needs that might be met by a modification of certification requirements?

2. Can the special needs of the students not now well served be met by the further development and modification of traditional models (the basic transfer and credit-by-exam models), or must new models be devised to supplement or supplant these? (Note: the "diploma mill" is a model that entirely dispenses with the instruction and examination functions, replacing them with a payment function.)

**Higher Education for Everybody? Issues and Implications*, ed. W. Todd Furniss (Washington: American Council on Education, March 1971).

In assessing the adaptability of the traditional models, the following questions should be considered:

- Do we need a clearer definition of the activities and qualities for which we now award degrees? Do we need to redefine some degrees entirely?
- Should there be nationwide quality standards for the various degrees? If so, should there be only minimum standards, or should there be a range of standards, say from basic through three levels of honors? (This question is one statement of the issue of "absolute accomplishment" versus "relative accomplishment.")
- Should the certification system continue to operate as a "degree or nothing" system, or should there be certificates for every stage of accomplishment?
- Should alternatives to the conventional certification models be available only to the academically very talented, or only to the least talented, or to everyone equally?
- Can some of the deficiencies of standard practice be overcome by new packages of academic and career advising, formal and informal instruction, and adjustments in educational timing, without changing the meaning of the degree?
- Can more *kinds* of instructional programs be accredited in advance (as are conventional instructional programs leading to transfer credit)? Will some *kinds* of instruction always require validation by subsequent examination? For example, how should Peace Corps experience be given credit, if at all?
- Are there valid reasons for maintaining "residence" requirements for a degree and for denying the transfer of all earned credit?
- To what extent should there be concern for the "image" of a degree? Should our goal be that a degree should have the same status as a driver's license?
- To what extent can consortium arrangements (including public educational systems) be used in place of or to supplement independent institutions as certifying agencies? For example, might a consortium of institutions near military bases around the country be authorized to award degrees in the name of the consortium?
- What provisions for accrediting unconventional certifying agencies can be made? Must such agencies always be faculty-based?
- Could evaluation of program elements be handled entirely by examining agencies (e.g., CEEB, ACT) and certification be based solely on the numbers of acceptably evaluated elements that a student has accumulated?

An A.C.E. SPECIAL REPORT

The material in this report is not copyrighted, and may be quoted and reproduced in the interest of education. Additional copies are not available for distribution.

AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION

ONE DUPONT CIRCLE • WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036